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State News Summary: Montana

Montana's College Opportunities Not Up to Par

San Jose, Calif., and Washington, D.C. — Young Montana residents are less likely to enroll in college than their peers in other states, an indication that the state is not educating its young population to the level needed in a competitive economy. The likelihood of enrolling in college by age 19 in Montana is 46 percent, compared with 57 percent in the best-performing states.

In addition, there are substantial gaps in college opportunities in the state. For example, 29 percent of Native American college students graduate with a bachelor's degree within six years of enrolling, compared with 45 percent of whites. In the top states, 65 percent of college students earn a bachelor's degree within six years.

These are among the major findings of *Measuring Up 2008: The National Report Card on Higher Education*, released today by the independent, nonpartisan National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. According to the report:

- College affordability has deteriorated. Poor and working-class families in Montana must devote 47 percent of their income, even after student financial aid, to pay for costs at public four-year colleges and universities.
- A low percentage (about 5 in 100) of working-age adults, ages 25 to 49, are enrolled in higher education.
- Ten percent of Native Americans have a bachelor's degree, compared with 30 percent of whites.
- Eighth graders perform well on national assessments in math, science, and reading, but their scores in writing are low.

“With the current challenges of a competitive global economy, states need to raise the level of education of their population to help their residents compete,” said Patrick M. Callan,

president of the National Center. “The purpose of *Measuring Up 2008* is to identify the key areas where states can improve.”

Measuring Up 2008 grades all 50 states in six overall areas of higher education performance, based on quantitative measures. Grades are calculated by comparing each state’s performance with that of the best states—defined as the median of the top five states. The report also identifies gaps in college opportunity and achievement by ethnic/racial groups within each state, as well as identifying each state’s improvements or declines on key indicators since the early 1990s.

Montana’s Grades:

Preparation:	B–
Participation:	D+
Affordability:	F
Completion:	C–
Benefits:	C+
Learning:	I

All states received an “Incomplete” in learning because there are not sufficient data to allow meaningful state-by-state comparisons.

Measuring Up 2008 includes a national report and 50 state reports. The national report offers a summary of the nation’s current performance, and improvements or declines since the early 1990s. The state reports provide a detailed picture of higher education in each state. *Measuring Up 2008* is the latest in a series of higher education report cards that began in 2000.

Upon release of the report card on Dec. 3, 2008, the national and state reports will be available at www.highereducation.org. The Web site also offers state-by-state comparisons, as well as technical information about methodology.

The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education promotes policies that enhance Americans’ opportunities to pursue and achieve a quality higher education. Established in 1998, the National Center is an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization. It is not associated with any institution of higher education, with any political party, or with any government agency.

(Please note: *Measuring Up 2008* is embargoed until Wednesday, Dec. 3. The findings of the report cannot appear before December 3.)

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